UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.327
3 October 1996

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Thirteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 327th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 1 October 1996, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BELEMBAOGO

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GE.96-18421 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Uruguay (CRC/C/3/Add.37; HRI/CORE/1/Add.9; CRC/Q/URU.1) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Bonasso, Mrs. Izquierdo, Mrs. Fernandez and Mrs. Rivero (Uruguay) resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. BONASSO (Uruguay), replying to questions asked by the members of the Committee the previous day, said that one of the Committee's concerns had been to know whether any measures had been taken to provide education for children in conflict with the law who had been detained in institutions. He agreed with Mrs. Santos País that the State had a responsibility to ensure that such children, whose level of educational achievement was often low, were given as much help as possible. There was no doubt that education was much more effective than deprivation of liberty in reforming young people. Under a law adopted the previous year, technical institutes were now responsible for providing study or training courses for juvenile offenders; the role of the National Minors' Institute (INAME) was to decide on the type of education or training best suited to the abilities of each particular child. Under an agreement with INAME, several non-governmental organizations, including Service, Peace and Justice in Latin America (SERPAJ) and Children's Forum, now provided courses for such young people and also helped them find work after their release.

3. The policy of INAME and of the other bodies concerned was that everything should be as open and transparent as possible. Several more training workshops were planned, as well as courses in the use of computer technology. One of the training establishments was a semi-open one, in which the inmates went out to work each day and returned in the evening, thus enabling them to become gradually accustomed to being at liberty. In addition, a programme was now under way to provide alternatives to confinement for children in conflict with the law under which they would remain free, but under supervision. The purpose of that approach was to improve rehabilitation and to avoid institutionalization as far as possible.

4. Adoption was regulated by the Adoption Institute, which was staffed by qualified professionals. INAME had recommended that the Institute should be given powers at the national level to decide on the handing over of children for adoption and that the courts should no longer have sole responsibility in the matter; he hoped that that recommendation would be approved. INAME's aim was not to seek a child for the parents, but, rather, parents for the child. While in principle the Institute did not favour breaking the link with the biological parents, it encouraged adoption if that seemed to be in the child's best interests.

5. Reference had also been made to the question of disappeared children: some progress had been made in that respect. From the moral standpoint, there could be no doubt that parents had every right to expect that action would be taken and he had no wish to minimize the importance of the tragedies that had

occurred, but the fact was that most disappearances had taken place outside Uruguay. The Government had no intention of closing the file on the subject and discussions were continuing, although there was a limit to what could be done now that so much time had elapsed.

6. Mrs. IZQUIERDO (Uruguay) confirmed that the majority of forced disappearances of children during the dictatorship in Uruguay from 1973 to 1984 had not occurred in Uruguayan territory. However, the fact that the country was a close neighbour of Brazil and Argentina, where they had occurred, meant that those in power in Uruguay at that time had to some extent been involved. It had been asked what had been done to help NGOs, particularly in Argentina, to look for those children. The previous year, a disappeared Uruguayan child had been located, who had been born while his parents had been in prison; both parents had subsequently disappeared. The Ministry of External Relations, as well as the Uruguayan Embassy in the country concerned, had played an active part in the case and had provided the child with all the support and protection possible.

7. Mr. RONASSO (Uruguay), replying to the question on street children, said that INAME had two programmes to assist such children, one in Montevideo and one in an outlying suburb, run jointly with an NGO and with the cooperation of UNICEF. The suburb had been chosen for one of the programmes in order to avoid breaking links with the children's families and disrupting their education, since the problem of street children was closely linked to the problem of school drop-outs. The programme was thus designed to operate not only in the centre of the city, where street children were usually found, but also in the outlying areas from which they had originally come.

8. INAME had had a number of requests from different parts of the country for help with the education and training of such children. Some two years previously, a number of training workshops had been set up in the main bus terminal in Montevideo designed to help the street children found near the terminal or passing through it. With financial support from UNICEF, moreover, INAME had just produced a survey of street children in Montevideo on which eight members of its staff had worked for three months. INAME intended to continue work on that project with a view to the eventual setting up of a centre which would cooperate with NGOs to provide a 24-hour care service.

9. Mrs. IZQUIERDO (Uruguay) said that torture was not specifically defined as a crime in Uruguayan law, although the country had ratified the Convention against Torture, which had consequently become part of domestic law. However, abuses of authority by police or other officials vis-à-vis persons held in custody before trial, or in prison after sentencing, were offences under the Penal Code.

10. With regard to the ill-treatment of minors, a law had recently been adopted, with the support of virtually all political parties in Parliament, making domestic violence a crime. One of the aims of the law was to protect children against ill-treatment by their families, their legal guardians or persons living with them. The penalties for that crime were severe, ranging from 6 to 24 months' imprisonment, the term being increased by one-third when the victim was under 16 years of age, suffered from physical or psychological handicaps, was a blood relation or shared the same household.

11. Mr. BONASSO (Uruguay), referring to Mr. Hammarberg's comment on the role played by the State in respect of the mass media, said that, in Uruguay, the media were seen as a valuable way of furthering national integration and reinforcing cultural identity by helping population groups in the more remote regions to become familiar with the Spanish language. The Government also had a mandate to control and monitor the mass media and television programmes were timed as far as possible to protect minors from undesirable viewing, but it was difficult to enforce control in practice. A commission composed of academics, Government officials and representatives of the media had been set up and was trying to introduce some kind of system of self-regulation, under which the amount of sex and violence in programmes would be reduced.

12. On the problem of alcohol, the effect of advertising had been that consumption by young people had increased considerably, and that was a matter of concern. The Government had launched publicity campaigns aimed at young people which were designed to change attitudes rather than to condemn or impose controls from above. Work on the problem was continuing in an effort to find the most effective type of action.

13. Mrs. IZQUIERDO (Uruguay) said that the legal provision governing the question of detention, namely, Decree Law No. 680, was a relic from the period of dictatorship and a number of international human rights bodies had drawn attention to the contradictions between it and international instruments on the subject and even with Uruguay's own Constitution. At present, however, it was not applied in practice. A revised version of the Penal Code was now under study in Parliament, which she hoped would soon be approved, and, once that Code had entered into force, Decree Law No. 680 would be superseded. However, it had to be recognized that, formally, it was still in force.

14. Mr. BONASSO (Uruguay) stressed that, although INAME was responsible for taking in young offenders who had been sentenced, it was the courts, not the police, which had the authority to decide what policy should be followed in dealing with them. The judge would normally order that, whenever possible, a child should be returned to his or her family. In dealing with young offenders, INAME tried to work together with families to see if an alternative solution could be found that would not involve institutionalization.

15. One member of the Committee had asked why Uruguay had set the age of access to employment for children at 14 instead of 15. The Government in fact fully accepted that its legislation should be brought into line with the Convention in that respect and efforts were now being made to remedy the situation. In the same way, Uruguay recognized that the child's right to privacy should be protected where exposure to the media was concerned. Although there was no press censorship in the country, the draft Children's Code contained provisions on the subject and everything possible would be done to ensure that they were complied with.

16. Mrs. KARP, welcoming the information relating to a study of street children, asked whether any link had been found between family violence and children leaving families to live on the streets. What conclusions had been reached with regard to sending such children back to their families? Had the

study given any attention to child prostitution or to measuring the scope of that problem? Was any consideration being given to the special treatment needs of child prostitutes?

17. Since the Committee had a keen interest in how legislation was applied in practice, she again asked what penalties were applied in the case of journalists who infringed the privacy of children. Were such cases common?

18. At what age were children considered competent to give evidence against abusive parents? Were any services available, such as special police or psychological units, to help children tell their stories? Was evidence provided by children acceptable in court? What problems were encountered in assessing the reliability of such evidence? Was corroboration of evidence provided by a child mandatory to secure a conviction?

19. In any decision on abortion, was age a deciding factor? Was consent required for abortion?

20. She would welcome further information on the mediation process applied in cases of family violence. It was apparently accepted that penal sanctions were not the only means of tackling the problem. What consideration was given to the child's views in the mediation process and in decisions on how the perpetrator should be treated?

21. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that, although the school enrolment rate in Uruguay was high and the literacy rate impressive, some indicators such as a high rate of repetition and the examination failure rate gave cause for concern, since they were a sign of problems with equity and the quality of education. A review of the quality of curricula might be indicated. Another factor affecting the quality of education was the status of teachers. When the teaching profession was not an attractive one and teachers had to find additional work to maintain a reasonable standard of living, educational standards tended to suffer, especially in rural schools or schools attended by children from less well-off families. Low pay and low status in the teaching profession generally led to authoritarian attitudes in schools, a lack of creativity in approaches to teaching and learning and participation by pupils. Had Uruguay any plans to remedy the situation?

22. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that, although child disappearances had not been a problem since the restoration of democracy, she continued to be concerned about the preservation and recovery of identity. How many cases were still pending? Was any official body looking into the matter?

23. On the adoption issue, she understood that INAME was authorized to deal with adoption in addition to its work with abandoned children. What was being done to resolve the conflict between these two duties?

24. The information that Decree Law No. 680 was no longer being applied was welcome. However, the fact that it was still on the statute book was disquieting; Uruguay should consider repealing that legislation.

25. Had Uruguay taken any steps to implement the Plan of Action adopted by the World Summit for Children? What was the Government's strategy with regard to the global goals for the mid-decade?

26. The list of issues contained a question relating to the education of parents. Had parents in Uruguay any access to advice or support from the State in order to ensure the harmonious development of children? The delegation had confined its response to the legislative aspects of the issue, but she would also like to know what social programmes were available to provide financial or other assistance to families in difficulty. What was the current situation with regard to child-care centres? Clarification of the aims and activities of the Children's Commissariat would be appreciated.

27. Although access to education and the literacy rate were admirable in Uruguay, the position of women in society did not reflect those educational advantages. Were the education offered to girls and the educational methods applied to them affected by discriminatory attitudes? How did the Children's Code currently under discussion deal with the question of gender?

28. The decline in infant mortality to a low of 18.7 in 1992 was to be applauded. However, the recent rise of that statistic to 18.9 was worrying. What was the explanation and had the Government any moves in mind to counter the trend?

29. Mrs. EUFEMIO said that, in Uruguayan families moving from rural districts to poor urban areas, it had been found that the rearing of children was almost exclusively the mother's responsibility. She wondered whether attitudes of male dominance ("machismo"), in which child care was considered a threat to the male ego, were responsible for that situation. Were any efforts being made in the schools to alter such attitudes among boys and girls, particularly at the ages when socialization was being initiated? In the case of single mothers who changed partners frequently, or families with fathers working away from home or neglectful of or violent with their children, what efforts were being made by the Government to ensure that all children enjoyed the right to a family environment?

30. The Uruguayan response to question 16 of the list of issues had been to refer the Committee to a provision of the Civil Code. What percentage of parents were in fact aware of the contents of the Civil Code? Was any attempt made to make such information available to them in accessible terms? Did the school curriculum provide for any training to prepare children for responsible parenthood when they became adults? Was any provision made in the curriculum to foster the development of children along the lines laid down in article 29 of the Convention or to bring about such changes in attitude through education?

31. She asked whether there was any cause in addition to teenage pregnancies for the number of single mothers. Was the State considering any action through the mass media, education or pre-marriage counselling to encourage a reduction in the number of single mothers and teach parenting skills? In the case of the many families with no adult male in the household, were any programmes planned to enlist male relatives, friends or teachers to provide a framework of social support for the children of such families?

32. According to a UNESCO report, teenage pregnancies led girls to drop out of school, thus limiting their opportunity to learn about parenting at school. Were any efforts being made to encourage pregnant teenagers to return to school or was the social stigma involved in teenage pregnancy too strong to prevent that?

33. Mr. MOMBESHORA said that, according to the report, current health policies had led to a reduction in Government intervention. What proportion of the current national budget was allocated to health, education and defence? Had any areas in particular suffered from the policy change? Why was priority in the new strategy for partnership being given to women and children in urban areas? Did such areas have greater access to services? What services were provided for dealing with teenage or unwanted pregnancies? Was any counselling, social or nutritional support available in such cases? What family planning programmes were in place in Uruguay and how accessible were they to the general public? How many women had their babies in hospital or other health facilities? Were neonatal HIV infections a problem in Uruguay? Were there enough trained personnel and facilities in place in Uruguay to provide care for all disabled children and ensure them a better life?

34. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said that the value of the Convention lay largely in its application in domestic legislation. It was therefore essential that Decree Law No. 680, which was completely contrary to the spirit of the Convention, should be repealed.

35. She welcomed the fact that Uruguay was a party to the Convention against Torture. However, torture must also be characterized as a crime in domestic criminal law and made subject to criminal sanctions if the message was to be conveyed to officials and others that the practice was abhorrent. In the case of domestic violence, criminal law should contain provisions to remove children from parental authority where necessary. In addition to the message conveyed by the law, the spirit of the Convention must be inculcated in society through education, dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation. It should become the general view that violence was not acceptable under any circumstances.

36. With reference to adoption, it was understood that some children would be unable to know who their natural parents were following adoption, as in the case of parents who were minors. It was hoped that the policy relating to surnames for children born out of wedlock could be changed, as it implied a stigma for the child.

37. Uruguay appeared to have no legislation governing international adoption. Although it intended to ratify the 1993 Hague Convention, it had not yet done so. What problems were being encountered as a result of that legal vacuum? What safeguards were in place to ensure that adoption was the best option for the child? Was any data available on the subsequent fate of children handed over to foreign couples? The report made no mention of illegal trafficking in children. Was that to be taken to mean that such trafficking did not occur in Uruguay?

38. Children appeared to be a growing minority in Uruguay. There appeared to be no bodies speaking on their behalf. Attention seemed to be given to them

only when they became a problem or a threat. There was a need for a better balance in attitudes towards children, who made a valuable contribution to society.

39. The reply to question 17 of the list of issues indicated a concern to avoid the institutionalization of children. However, many children were in institutions because their parents had no means of providing for their needs and so lacked the psychological supports to development provided by the family environment. Greater efforts needed to be made to enable children to remain with their families. She welcomed the information provided on the existence of a network of carers in Uruguay, but asked how that system was monitored.

40. Mrs. KARP, referring to paragraph 210 of the report, asked whether the relative imbalance in the proportions of women attending State and private health centres was evidence of an increasing trend towards privatization in the health field. Mention had been made of the many programmes devoted to children in special need. To what extent did existing services cover the needs of such children? Were there long waiting lists for admission to institutions owing to the lack of places as a result of insufficient budget allocations? The principal causes of death in the 15 to 30 year-old age group were apparently traffic accidents and suicide. What mental health services existed for children? Was there any legislation regulating admission of children to mental care facilities? Did the child have any say in such admission in view of the stigma attached to mental illness? Were there any plans to enable more children to receive treatment for drug abuse?

41. Miss MASON said that the age for consent to sexual intercourse appeared to be 14, although the legal age for marriage was 12 for girls and 14 for boys. Were proceedings often instituted against persons who engaged in sexual intercourse with minors? Stressing the importance of teacher status in improving the quality of education, she asked what efforts were being made to improve teacher training and what educational qualifications teachers had, especially in rural areas. What was the male to female ratio among teachers and what was the teacher to pupil ratio? Did parents play any part in the educational system, for example, through parent/teacher associations?

42. Mrs. BADRAN said she had understood that one of the main areas of concern in UNICEF's cooperation with Uruguay was family life. She wished to know whether such cooperation focused on the prevention of the breakdown of family life or took a remedial approach to the problem and whether any studies had been conducted to explain the deterioration of the family in Uruguay.

43. Despite Uruguay's good health indicators, there were wide disparities in the level of health care available, even in the capital. For example, the indicators for infant mortality in Montevideo varied between 4 per thousand and 74 per thousand. She asked whether priority consideration had been given to bridging the gap between the privileged and underprivileged sectors of the population.

44. The statistics on environmental health, particularly with regard to sanitation, were surprising because the figures suggested that fewer people in urban areas had adequate sanitation than people in rural areas. The

statistics seemed questionable in view of the fact that far more people had access to safe water supplies in cities than in the rural part of the country.

45. Given the high drop-out rate at the primary school level, she wondered whether vocational training institutions existed and whether preparatory education for such training had been introduced at the primary level. Referring to discrimination against women, she asked whether the school curriculum had been reviewed in order to eliminate gender bias and promote gender equality.

46. Mr. KOLOSOV said that the Committee's task in formulating its concluding observations and recommendations to the Government of Uruguay would be difficult because information from sources other than the Government had not given as good an impression of conditions in Uruguay as the one the delegation had tried to create.

47. Attitudes towards street children were gradually changing, but, despite the involvement of non-governmental organizations in programmes intended for such children, the problem remained serious. He asked whether the public and the police treated those children as potential offenders.

48. He also wished to know to what extent the mass media violated the privacy of juvenile offenders through excessive media coverage and asked how much access young people had to information on their rights through the print and electronic media.

49. Mrs. IZQUIERDO (Uruguay) said that, although she did not know the exact number of children who had been victims of forced disappearances, she was sure it was not more than 18, 10 of whom had been found since the end of the dictatorship and the restoration of democracy.

50. Mr. BONASSO (Uruguay) said that many children had been handed over by the judiciary to the National Minors' Institute (INAME) for adoption. INAME was involved in the adoption process at various levels and had maintained that involvement because it was equipped to carry out all the necessary studies and tests before adoption took place.

51. Replying to the comment that children were perceived as threats to adults, he said that it was not surprising that such feelings existed in a country having Uruguay's demographic composition. INAME was working on changing attitudes among adults to encourage them to value young persons as scarce human resources, and to create a link between the generations.

52. Mrs. FERNANDEZ (Uruguay) said that, since the preparation of the National Action Plan in 1992, the Government had been involved in a number of activities coordinated by the Social Policies Division of the Office of Planning and Budget. The areas covered by the Plan were health, education, nutrition, children in particularly difficult circumstances, and women. Assessments of indicators had been carried out annually and an overall evaluation of the Plan had been conducted in 1995. In general, the mid-term objectives had been achieved and, in some cases, the goals for the year 2000

had already been reached. The Government was planning to revise and update the Plan and to introduce new goals directly related to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

53. Mr. BONASSO (Uruguay) said that the Commission on Children, for which the Ministry of the Interior was responsible, had so far operated only in Montevideo. The Ministry would, however, work with police headquarters throughout the country to provide specialized services to ensure that cases involving minors were handled by persons experienced in dealing with children's problems.

54. Mrs. IZQUIERDO (Uruguay) said that integrated educational reform was under way to improve the standard of education and incorporate the elements of modern teaching theory into the education system. The reform was a difficult task which had met with some opposition but, once the implementation of the reform plan had begun, students, teachers and parents had asked to be included in the discussions with the Government.

55. Teachers held regular assemblies to assess the education system and to present their concerns to the authorities and there were parents' associations that interacted with school boards. The teaching profession required training at the tertiary level and it was impossible for a person to teach in private or public schools in Uruguay without full certification by the authorities.

56. Mr. BONASSO (Uruguay) said that the Government was aware of its shortcomings, but willing to act on the recommendations made by the Committee. For example, it had intensified efforts to lower the infant mortality rate, which had actually declined by 10 points between 1985 and 1990, and it was committed to fulfilling its obligation to improve the situation in the health and other sectors through the adoption of appropriate measures.

57. The health system consisted of public and private components. Public health services were free of charge and intended primarily for the low-income sectors of the population. The quality of such health services and of private collectivized medical care was of a particularly high standard. It was nevertheless true that the quality of the data collected in urban and rural areas was not always consistent, and that accounted for discrepancies in health indicators.

58. The Government was making every effort to eliminate "machismo" in Uruguayan society, particularly in rural areas. It was unfortunately the case that women themselves perpetuated chauvinistic attitudes, but there was hope that the trend could be reversed.

59. The problem of teenage pregnancy required action in the health and education sectors, as well as action by INAME and the Institute for the Family and Women. In that connection, the Uruguayan Government was convinced of the importance of a primary health care strategy and supported the work being done by the Pan American Health Organization, the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Sexual conduct was an issue which needed to be dealt with systematically in school curricula. In reply to Mrs. Eufemio's question on the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy, he said that some measures had been

adopted, but new approaches to the problem were needed. INAME had set up some homes and shelters where pregnant girls could continue their education, but such services were not yet widely available.

60. Mrs. IZQUIERDO (Uruguay) said that one of the major reforms under way in the area of education related to teachers' salaries. Improvements in that regard were expected to have a direct impact on the quality of education, particularly in poorer areas where schools served as reference points not only for learning, but also for recreation, nutrition and family guidance.

61. As far as budgetary allocations for health were concerned, Uruguay had 12 priority health programmes that had already attracted large investments from the Government and from international donors.

62. Ninety per cent of births took place in public or private hospitals and clinics and the number of deliveries that took place at home, without medical supervision, had thus declined.

63. Mr. BONASSO (Uruguay) said that Uruguay had not had a children's hospital until a few months previously, when two hospitals had been appointed to provide care specifically for children in the capital and in the provinces, respectively.

64. Breast-feeding was unfortunately not prevalent in Uruguay and UNICEF had launched a promotional campaign to deal with that issue. Although the use of milk formula was not encouraged in hospitals, one of the reasons that breast-feeding was not the usual practice was that women were returning to work within months of giving birth and were therefore substituting milk formula for breast milk. It was hoped that Uruguay would make strides in its breast-feeding campaign by the year 2000.

65. A study on the problem of child prostitution had been carried out in cooperation with UNICEF. The National Minors' Institute had found that there were a number of girls whose behaviour, while not qualifying as prostitution, could be described as sexually promiscuous. It had tried to provide shelter for those girls and was very cautious in providing information in order to avoid exposing them to risk and to protect them from persons who intended to exploit them for improper financial gain.

66. With regard to juvenile justice, INAME had never sought to find any young person criminally responsible and had always followed the correct legal procedures in dealing with juvenile offenders.

67. Any report of the ill-treatment of a young person by an employee of an official shelter or home, regardless of the employee's position, was fully investigated and the appropriate criminal law penalties were imposed.

68. Mrs. IZQUIERDO (Uruguay), referring to domestic violence, said that the process of reconciliation involved professional psychological counselling for both the aggressor and the victim, unless legal action needed to be taken. Safe houses for battered women had so far existed only in Montevideo.

69. Despite ongoing attempts, the Government had not been very successful in ensuring that children would not have to appear in court to give evidence.

70. Mr. BONASSO (Uruguay) said that the new Children's Code would contain provisions to deal with the stigma attached to the naming of children of single mothers.

71. The Government of Uruguay had a clear preference for national adoptions and had not yet ratified the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption. In the past 13 months, an authorization had been granted for only one child to be adopted internationally. In that particular case, it had been decided that the child, who was blind, would have better prospects for developing his abilities in the foreign country concerned. International adoptions were thus authorized with due account being taken of the quality of the follow-up care available.

72. With regard to the relationship between children in detention and poor social circumstances, INAME firmly believed that it was better to treat juveniles within their families, through social and economic assistance, than to place them in institutions. It was recognized that there were weaknesses in follow-up action for the evaluation of the conditions under which children lived in foster homes.

73. There was a clear trend for pregnant women to seek private health care, although public health care was free and available to all.

74. The National Food Supplement Programme was offered to all needy pregnant women and to all children under six years of age as a preventative measure. The Ministry of Public Health also conducted a feeding programme to deal with identified cases of nutritional deficiency.

75. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to ask questions on the section of the list of issues entitled "Special protection measures".

76. Miss MASON asked whether child workers benefited from the work of the Labour Inspectorate. Did the Inspectors ensure that they were fairly paid and had access to health services when they were ill? She also asked whether the Government had considered taking economic measures, such as the institution of a system of small business loans, to generate employment for families who would otherwise be obliged to send their children out to work. Had any real survey been made of working children, especially in the informal sector, with a view to establishing reliable statistics?

77. Mrs. KARP asked what three main areas should, in the delegation's view, be the focus of attention in terms of research, manpower and budgetary allocations in order to ensure the fuller implementation of the Convention.

78. Mr. BONASSO (Uruguay) said that the Labour Inspectorate was responsible for checking the age of young workers, ensuring that they were not employed in night work or on tasks too heavy for them, and so forth. Certainly, the employment of children was not regarded as a remedy for the economic

situation. Two programmes directed at the population between 15 and 24 years of age which had been forced to drop out of school had been put into effect with the assistance of the Inter-American Development Bank.

79. In reply to Mrs. Karp's question, he would say that the whole thrust of the Government's action was preventive. Hence its eagerness to strengthen family ties and provide more assistance to families. The paramount importance of education was fully recognized, as shown by the efforts being made to extend preschool education nationwide and ensure that it was accessible to poorer families, as well as to provide opportunities so that disadvantaged children forced to drop out of school could resume their education. The new Government was continuing the start already made on enhancing teacher training and engaging in an overall revision of the education system, as recommended in the studies carried out by ECLAP.

80. The revised Children's Code that would soon be adopted would be fully in line with the spirit of the Convention. The Government was also committed to promoting the participation of NGOs. Efforts would be directed at preventing the abandonment of children and their institutionalization, counteracting ill-treatment and abuse of all kinds, strengthening programmes for the prevention of teenage pregnancy, while at the same time ensuring care for young unmarried mothers and pressing forward with efforts to prevent and remedy child prostitution.

81. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to make their concluding observations on the initial report of Uruguay.

82. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS thanked the Uruguayan delegation for its frank and open approach to the discussion of the report. The country's problems had been recognized and willingness expressed to take the Committee's suggestions for improvement into account.

83. Despite those positive trends, however, some aspects continued to be of concern to the Committee. First, priority must be given to the adoption of the new Code for Children and Adolescents. That process should coincide with the reform of all legislation contrary to the spirit of the Convention and the adoption of new laws in those fields not yet covered, such as international adoption and the recognition of torture as a crime. Secondly, it was important that there should be effective coordination, both horizontally and vertically, between all the Government departments involved, as well as interaction with the municipal authorities with a view to strengthening their power to meet the needs of families. Action on behalf of children should have a greater claim on the country's resources, with priority being given to the most needy in order to avoid the perpetuation of poverty. More money should be spent on education and health. A special effort should be made to identify indicators of hidden problems such as child abuse, child prostitution and the illicit traffic in children.

84. The Convention should play an important part in information and training programmes. Stress should be laid on its provisions in the training of social workers and teachers and public authorities and members of Parliament should also be made aware of its provisions. The new Children's Code was currently before the Parliament and she hoped that its members would be informed of the

Committee's conclusions and be influenced by them. Their support was also important from the point of view of budgetary allocations. She hoped that steps would be taken to include teaching about the Convention in school curricula and that greater efforts would be made to cooperate with NGOs, which were often closer to the people than the Government could be.

85. The general principles of the Convention should be systematically applied. The age of marriage should be kept as high as possible. Employment should not be permitted under the age of 15 and the age of criminal responsibility should be raised to 18. The concept of illegitimacy should be abandoned and any stigma removed. Special measures were needed to support families in order to prevent the abandonment of children and their consequent institutionalization. Special measures were also needed to ensure that the rights of children in detention were respected and, in the field of justice in general, it was important that new legislation should reflect the provisions of articles 37 and 40 of the Convention in particular.

86. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that he would like the Government to consider making a general review of Uruguayan legislation and practice in the light of the provisions of article 3 of the Convention whereby the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration. The impact on children should be taken into account at all stages of the decision-making process. Doing so would automatically give children a more important place in society. That should be accompanied by a further discussion of the best means of guaranteeing the independent monitoring of the system through the appointment of an ombudsman or in some other way. There should be more systematic training and education of key professionals in the field of children's rights and there was also a need for a more targeted investigation of services in certain areas, to serve as the basis for a more in-depth discussion.

87. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that the dialogue with the Uruguayan delegation had clarified and supplemented the report and the other documents submitted. Among the positive points that had emerged were the satisfactory indicators regarding health and education and the moment of opportunity for reform afforded by the inauguration of the new Government.

88. As a general recommendation, she stressed the need for a change of attitude towards the way in which children were perceived, taking as its basis the ethical and legal content of the Convention. Children and adolescents needed to have their own place in the country's political agenda so that their primary interests could be reflected in policies and strategies, as well as in budgetary allocations and in the improvement of their real situation in the country. She also emphasized the need for a reliable diagnosis of problems based on systematic and structured studies and statistics and for a better system of information. Regarding the new Children's Code, there was a need not only to speed up the debate, but also to ensure that it was open to the various sectors of society, including NGOs.

89. One of her chief concerns was the unequal access to services and opportunities of such vulnerable groups as poor children, black children, street children, the disabled, child workers and victims of ill-treatment. She stressed the importance of participation by children, who should be encouraged to form associations so as to take part and cooperate in

formulating policies and discussing topics important to them. She again commended the Uruguayan delegation on its positive attitude and expressed the hope that its members would return to their country with a strengthened determination to foster the implementation of the Convention.

90. Mrs. BADRAN thanked the Uruguayan delegation and said that she looked forward to seeing a number of the Committee's recommendations put into effect. Although current indicators showed that the situation in Uruguay was satisfactory in some respects, an effort would be needed to sustain it, since the economic difficulties caused by structural adjustment and the recession could well have a negative influence. Two problems in particular needed special study: first, why were the young and educated emigrating from Uruguay - something that could have very serious demographic consequences given the country's small child population - and, secondly, why was the institution of the family disintegrating? A system of incentives was needed to halt the emigration of young people and encourage them to marry and found legitimate families of their own. There should also be incentives to stay at school. One way of encouraging young people to stay in the country was to open up opportunities for them to participate in the various community structures. That would give them a sense of belonging and would help with popular participation in general, since, unless a start was made early by training children to participate, it was difficult to persuade them to do so at a later stage.

91. Mr. MOMBESHORA regretted that shortage of time had prevented the Uruguayan delegation from replying to his question about family planning. Nevertheless, the information provided about early and unwanted pregnancies showed that there was a major problem in that regard. Family planning could be a useful strategy for improving the health of mothers and children and a valuable tool for reducing the adverse social and psychological effects of unwanted pregnancies. He was sure that, when the members of the delegation returned to Uruguay, they would look into that area with a view to fitting family planning into health programmes.

92. Mrs. KARP said that Uruguay had to formulate policies for removing disparities and to change attitudes towards participation by children. The principles of the Convention should be implemented in a holistic way, with the best interests of the child and his right to development seen as a single subject having different aspects. There was also a need to strengthen services for victims of violence and abuse, particularly to help ensure that they were rehabilitated rather than doubly victimized.

93. Mrs. EUFEMIO said that one particular aspect of the research that had been recommended, namely, the identification of attitudinal biases and negative aspects of culture and tradition that could impede the promotion of the rights of the child, should be used as a basis for experimenting with strategies and developing new programmes that would promote the preventive approach referred to by the Uruguayan delegation. She also suggested that the plan of action should be updated to include not only health, education, social security and assistance to children in difficult circumstances, but also the promotion of civil rights and freedom of children to participate. Since funds were necessarily limited, certain populations should be specifically targeted and the precise number to be benefited should be part of the plan.

94. The CHAIRPERSON said she was sure that the Uruguayan delegation realized that the purpose of the Committee's observations, suggestions and recommendations was to help the Government improve its action on behalf of children in accordance with the provisions of the Convention.

95. Mr. BONASSO (Uruguay) assured the Committee that everything that had been said would be reflected upon and shared with the different sectors involved in the care and education of children. He thanked the Committee for its understanding and helpful approach.

96. Mrs. RIVERO (Uruguay) thanked the Committee for its careful and knowledgeable consideration of the Uruguayan report. She was particularly grateful to the Centre for Human Rights for its willing and efficient cooperation with her delegation.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.